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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005519

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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL TALWAR AND FM QASRAWI DISCUSS GAZA  
WITHDRAWAL, IRAQ, AND IRAN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: In a July 9 meeting, Jordanian Foreign Minister Farouk Qasrawi shared with Senior Professional Staff Member Puneet Talwar (SFRC) and Charge his opinions on regional issues. The upcoming Gaza withdrawal, Qasrawi felt, should be followed up with further Israeli withdrawals and a concerted world focus on the economic development of the Palestinian territories. To confront Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and Fatah would first have to reform themselves. The situation in Iraq would be improved by a lowered profile for U.S. armed forces and more visible and accelerated reconstruction efforts. Ahmedinejad's election as president of Iran was bad for the region, and the Iranians unfortunately would not give up their nuclear program even with pressure. END SUMMARY.

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GAZA WITHDRAWAL  
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2. (C) Minister Qasrawi stated that the Palestinians were disillusioned with the stagnation in the economy, their lack of freedom of movement, the continuation of construction of settlements and the barrier, the lack of basic public order in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the disarray within the PA. Even so, he said, the Palestinians must now show unity and ensure that the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza is allowed to proceed in a quiet, orderly manner. Otherwise, the Palestinians would be the "big losers." Unfortunately, said Qasrawi, there seemed to be a lack of coordination between Israel and the PA on the withdrawal. (NOTE: In an aside, Qasrawi mentioned that prior to the meeting, he had been in a conference call with the Jordanian Embassy in Israel and Abdul Salam Abbadi, Jordan's Minister of Awqaf, regarding threat information shared by the government of Israel. This information, he intimated, concerned the possibility that Jewish extremist groups might attempt something against the Islamic sites on the Temple Mount in order to disrupt the withdrawal from Gaza.)

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NEXT STEPS  
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3. (C) In Gaza, economic development needed to happen quickly, Qasrawi said. He was pleased by the appointment of James Wolfensohn to spearhead this effort, and said that the \$3 billion that the G8 had promised the Palestinians would help to change their perceptions of their own potential. However, he said, Israel needed to continue its phased withdrawal as laid out in the roadmap, concentrating particularly on making good on promised withdrawals from West Bank cities. Qasrawi noted in this context the Jordanian offer to send the remnants of the Palestinian Liberation Army (the "Badr Corps") to help with the security of the West Bank. President Abbas had asked for them, they were depoliticized, and their lack of strong local ties after so many years abroad might be an advantage. However, the Israelis had turned them down. Qasrawi also noted that Jordan stood ready to train Palestinian troops in Jordan.

4. (C) If there were no further steps to withdraw after Gaza, there would be further problems. Qasrawi particularly worried that if Palestinians saw no hope, they would start trying to emigrate. He noted that just the possibility of this happening was already the occasion for considerable domestic concern in Jordan, especially among the Parliament. Jordanians, both for demographic and economic reasons, saw a further influx of Palestinians as a threat, and they were alarmed at both the statements made by the Lebanese about sending their Palestinian population to Jordan and the imagined American and Israeli conspiracies to push the West Bank Palestinians over the river.

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THE PA AND HAMAS  
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5. (C) Qasrawi noted that Hamas was already a potentially more powerful political force than Fatah. Already, they were claiming credit for the withdrawal from Gaza, and they would

likely win any elections held under Israeli occupation. The PA had neither the firepower nor the popularity to take Hamas on; President Abbas was "not another Arafat" and was having a hard enough time dealing with the legacy of corruption within the PA and trying to counter disgruntled Fatah cadres who had lost their meal tickets in the PA. Qasrawi pointed out that Israeli measures were only one of the factors causing Hamas to gain popularity; its social welfare network and reputation for incorruptibility were at least equally important. The only hope for the PA, then, would be to reform and become more popular than Hamas. Fatah, too, would have to democratize, leaving behind its historic role as a one-man show centering around Arafat. Qasrawi noted that there was strong rhetorical support for Hamas even in Jordan, though he did not believe that they had any organization in the refugee camps of Jordan.

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IRAQ  
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16. (C) Qasrawi had definite ideas on ways in which he thought the situation in Iraq might be improved. Most important, he felt, was the continued transfer of policing duties from the American soldiers to Iraqis. Yes, Iraqi policemen could be brutal and had recently been savaged in an article in The Economist; nonetheless, Iraqis preferred dealing with them to dealing with the Americans. The more the U.S. army lowered its profile, the further the demands for a timetable for withdrawal would recede. The Sunnis were already more concerned about getting a "more-than-fair" voice on the constitutional drafting committee than about a timetable.

17. (C) A second measure the U.S. should take, according to Qasrawi, was an acceleration of its reconstruction program with a focus on visible projects. Such a measure would isolate the terrorists in Iraq, of which Qasrawi's Iraqi counterparts believed 80% were foreign.

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IRAN  
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18. (C) Qasrawi stated that while the recent election of Ahmedinejad as president had been a bad sign, it was not a completely unexpected occurrence. Nobody had really been excited about Rafsanjani, and once the suspect first round of elections had narrowed the field to two candidates, Qasrawi said, he had predicted a victory for Ahmedinejad. The Ahmedinejad victory, however, was not good for either Iraq or the Palestinians. The ill effects of the election on the latter had been seen recently in Hizbullah-provoked incidents that could not have happened without the connivance of the Iranians. Iran, Qasrawi said, did not care about the welfare of the Palestinians even at the popular level - but this fact only made them more dangerous, because they could play the issue in pursuit of purely cynical goals.

19. (C) Qasrawi was equally pessimistic about the prospects for stopping the Iranian nuclear program. Iran, he said, wanted to regain its role as the primary regional force, which it had lost in the Iran-Iraq War. The nuclear program was one issue that the entire country could agree on; even liberal Iranians would not criticize it. Therefore, even the likely European backlash against Iran in the wake of the election would not be enough to deter the Iranian leadership from using the program to unite the people behind them.

110. (U) Puneet Talwar cleared this cable.  
HALE